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AUTHOR Kozolanka, Karne
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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the attitudes of students on a building-trades course to explore the interacting ideas of engagement, gender identity, and experience. The house building course integrated several high school technological subjects with English. Students granted interviews and allowed access to their journals, written as part of their English credit. Particular attention is paid to the lived experiences of the 4 women among 20 men in the class. Three themes emerged from the females' experiences. A primary concern of the women was interpersonal relationships, evidenced by more frequent journal writing, defining their roles in terms of their relationships with others, and their perceptions of their ability to make positive contributions to the class. The second theme was self-esteem. Journal entries showed that the women were greatly concerned about what others thought of their skills. Women exhibited low self-esteem and tended to think of themselves as lacking in capabilities. The third theme was sexism and harassment, which was both subtle and overt, and often in the form of "good natured fun." The primary concern for males was the ability to do the job; other concerns were addressed in the context of getting the job done. These findings raise questions about how curriculum could be redesigned to accommodate the learning perspectives and needs of women. A broader discussion then focuses on the tensions between utilitarian education that emphasizes work preparation, and education for personal development that questions the legitimacy of prevailing social roles. Contains 28 references. (TD)

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Chapter 6

GENDER AND ENGAGEMENT IN A JOBSITE CLASSROOM

Karne Kozolanka

Karne Kozolanka is a journeyman carpenter turned teacher. He was educated in his trades through apprenticeship, at Acadia University, and later with an MEd from Queen's University. Karne has published several articles on the nature of experience in technological education. He teaches at the Faculty of Education, University of Regina.

In this chapter, Karne draws on his study of students on a building-trades course to explore the interacting ideas of engagement, gender identity, and experience. He pays particular attention to the voices of 4 women in a class of 20 men as he grapples with the tensions between utilitarian education on the one hand and education for personal development on the other. In doing these things, he connects us to the relevant literature and shows where much more work needs to be done, both in understanding practice and in developing theory.

The house is two stories high with a roof that slopes in four directions. It is partially covered from the bottom up with shingles and figures wearing yellow hard hats. The roof over the wrap-around porch is almost completely shingled and the figures there are bent over on their knees. Two sides of the house angle away at the corner and are in the process of being covered as well—with siding instead of shingles. One side is flanked with scaffolds on which are stacked long bundles of siding. Here, too, the siding is creeping up the wall, the grey vinyl contrasting sharply with the rough texture of gold-coloured waferboard. Behind a rusty Honda Civic, still partially loaded with tools and cords, are three students leaning over an aluminum bending-and-cutting machine. Two of them are holding a long, wide piece of aluminum and the third is pulling down on the handle. On the far side, a mid-morning delivery from the lumber yard has just dumped a load of lumber onto the mushy ground. One student is already handing 2x4s in through the basement window, as two others are looking over the invoice with the driver of the truck. The scene is like an ant colony—everyone bustling about, intent on one task or another.

It's a jobsite, but it's a classroom too. Just as every jobsite has its workers, this classroom has students. In fact, at the beginning of the semester, there wasn't even a class "room"—only a hole in the ground. To a passer-by, it would seem to be a site with a lot of workers—much more than the usual number. Looking closer, one would also see that the workers aren't all male either; there are at least four females visible....

Scenes like this are becoming more typical in mainstream secondary schooling. This particular building-trades program is representative of a worldwide trend in education to provide experiences which reflect the realities of life in the world beyond school (Gibbons, 1974, 1976, 1984; Horwood, 1987, 1993; Ontario, 1989a, 1989b, 1993; Wigginton, 1985). Technological Studies has long proven to be fertile ground for the establishment of such experiential programs. Experiential education and the teaching of technological subjects have similar roots, for example, in apprenticeships, internships, and cooperative education.

One such program was studied by Horwood (1994) in which students used a theme of cultural journalism to explore and publish

accounts about their community. Two of the students, Emily Doubt and Gillian Ramsey (1991), expressed how it was for them:

> A lot of learning went on throughout the semester although the approach was quite different from the school we've been used to. The things we learned could not have come out of a textbook; we had practical experience and learned by doing things, not just by listening to an explanation. We learned valuable lessons from our mistakes, from everything we said and did, and from everyone we came into contact with. That's what life is all about. We went out into the world for half a year and we lived. (p. 25)

My interest in these programs stems from my own background as a marginally engaged secondary student and my subsequent awareness of the potential for these new programs to interest, motivate, and, ultimately, engage students. I was interested in finding out what qualities were present that allowed students, in their words, to "learn valuable lessons." When the opportunity arose, I took part in a house-building program which integrated several high school technological subjects with English. Students granted me interviews and allowed me access to their journals, written as part of their English credit. Their quotations are meant to represent a much larger body of similar material. All names, of course, have been changed and the texts used with permission.

Although an earlier account (Kozolanka, 1993) demonstrates that both the women and men were engaged at different levels in numerous and varied activities, this discussion focuses more specifically on engagement as it relates to the development of one's gender identity. Closely related to the experiences of these adolescent and adult women are issues that impact the engagement patterns of men as well. I begin with a discussion of engagement followed by an interpretation of the lived experiences of male and female students on the jobsite as they relate to gender issues. I then re-frame these interpretations in a critique informed by critical pedagogy, and finally, discuss some implications for practice.

Engagement

Engagement is a difficult term to define. While the Oxford dictionary (Allen, 1990) provides some assistance and a logical starting point, it seems that the term can have confusing meanings. For example, a student who has come into battle with the school system and is in constant trouble could be as intimately engaged as an honours student. The same could hold true for one who is just taking part. Engagement can, it seems, be at either end of a scale which could range from open hostility to friendly collaboration.

Engagement can also be understood in terms of what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) calls the experience of "flow," in which people are participating in activities they find intrinsically enjoyable and "outside the parameters of worry and boredom" (p. 35). Literature from experiential education also provides some help in defining what engagement in school is about. Proudman (1992) describes experiential education as a set of relationships. Gibbons (1976) and James (1968) each outline a vision of student experiences at different relational levels. Where Proudman identifies the axes of relationship as individual to self, to the teacher, and to the learning environment, Gibbons reaches further and identifies the personal, interpersonal, and impersonal levels. James, however, describes three modes of active engagement with the environment—enquiry, dialogue, and making—which can also be understood as relational terms. Enquiry represents formal investigation; dialogue depicts a kind of curious and speculative wondering; making is creative, productive activity which is the culmination of enquiry and dialogue. It is these relational descriptions that help to formulate a definition of engagement which, simply stated, is *being emotionally involved within the substance of an activity*, where emotional involvement suggests some kind of intimate contact with others and phenomena. This intimate contact would result in some kind of social or technical artifact: for example, new understanding represented in some concrete manner.

Lived Experiences in the Program

Being female and coming to school in this secondary, technological-studies program was a different experience from that of the males in the program. Nevertheless, in general, the females worked with the males doing similar tasks. There were some exceptions; for example, females did not spend a lot of time doing the high work on the roof. But neither did all of the males. While the stories of each of the 4 females (among 20 males) in the program are different and unique, general threads emerged from their experiences that corroborate some of the literature in feminist theory. Of the four, the two adults kept extensive journals on a regular basis. The two adolescent women wrote less, but still a substantial amount more than their male classmates. All four helped to shed some light on what life was like as a female working and studying in the program. What emerged were three themes. The journals of the females reflected a primary concern and attention to interpersonal relationships. The two other themes were self-esteem, and sexism and harassment. Relationship interests permeated their journal entries and conversations with me:

> The whole day went really well. It seemed like everyone participated in something. . . . I felt really proud when we put up the parting wall. I almost felt like crying. It was a very happy moment for me. (Susan journal 1, p. 20)

> I feel this type of environment and types of activities let a person be themselves. My first opinions of some specific people has really changed . . . yesterday, I had really negative feelings about taking the course. Tracy knew everybody—I often felt left out. (Aimee journal 1, p. 1)

The engagement of the females in this program can be measured in part by the degree that the program allowed the women to experience and express relational needs. According to Gilligan (1982), women have different developmental needs than men. I'm wondering if this particular program met the relational needs of the women enrolled:

> As Freud and Piaget call our attention to the differences in children's feelings and thought, enabling us to respond to children with greater care and respect, so a recognition of the differences in women's experiences and understanding expands our vision of maturity and points to the contextual nature of developmental truths. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 174)

Journalling, interviews, and observations of the women revealed a concern for the manner in which the job was being done, who was getting along with whom, and how they felt about their contributions and sense of place in the class. Of course, their concerns were not limited to relational issues alone (for example, they were also committed to finishing the house by the end of the semester), but relationships played a central part in their experiences. A number of examples emerged—more frequent and intense use of journalling, females defining their roles in terms of their relationships with others, and how the women perceived themselves as persons capable of making positive contributions to the class.

The second theme was self-esteem. This was also linked to relational issues. The two mature women in the program expressed surprise and delight a number of times when told in one way or another that their work was appreciated by others:

> When I was deciding whether or not I wanted to take this program, I was really afraid that I wouldn't fit in or the group would have their own little cliques. Thanks Brian for letting me in. Paul, thanks to you too for telling Dan I was the best nailer. (Susan journal 1, pp. 1–10)

> The board that I had been working on was leaning up against the wall and Dave picked it up and handed it up to the guys on the roof. Michel said, "Who cut that?" And someone said, "Helen did." Then someone else said, "Well if Helen did it I bet it's all right, so let's just put it in." So they did and it fit! None of them knew I was listening from down below. One part of me said, "Oh, they're being sarcastic," and the other said, "Maybe I'm not that bad after all." (Helen journal 1, p. 39)

What the others on the site thought about their skills really mattered to the females. If these things did matter to the males, for

some reason they did not write or talk openly about them. Another distinct difference between the genders was the females' inclination to internalize problems. At one point early in the semester, Aimee was quite frustrated when she thought she was not being taken seriously by the teachers in the assignment of tasks. In the following excerpt, we see how she questions her ability to make decisions, her patience, and her skill level:

> Once again I was questioning myself as to what I'm doing out in the freezing cold at 8 a.m. building a house!!!??? This morning such as every other morning was horrible. I seem to have no patience. I always seem to be stuck doing menial tasks. (Aimee journal 1, p. 15)

None of the males reflected a similar process of self-doubt. They seemed to project uncertainty and problems onto someone or something else. In their exploration of women's ways of knowing, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) report that "Some women were so consumed with self-doubt that they found it difficult to believe a teacher's praise, especially when the teacher was a man" (p. 197). Journal entries and interviews with the females of this program show a tendency for them to think of themselves as lacking in capabilities and not worth much. This is important because a person who feels that she is of less value than males, for instance, would not be likely to challenge the status quo in a mixed group. It is possible that she would be perceived as a radical, challenging existing social orders. Aimee took a long time to tell the teachers that she was not happy delegated to menial work. When she did, it was indirectly through her journal. Helen's first reaction to the comments by her male co-workers was to think that they were being sarcastic. Helen was street smart and wise in the give and take of the jobsite, yet despite her life experience and older age, she often questioned her role on the site:

> So it seems every job I get lately has been what I'd consider a thinking job and I have had to do it myself, which is beginning to annoy me. Sometimes I get so frustrated I want to just walk away from it. I'm sure if I was working with someone else I could at least bounce ideas off them to get their impact. I'm also wondering if everyone

> has said to Dan that they don't want to work with me. Maybe I'm just being paranoid. (Helen journal 1, p. 32)

Even though Helen wondered if her self-doubts were paranoia, she was not able to see that she was clever and the teachers recognised her ability to handle "thinking" jobs.

The third theme was sexism and harassment. These could be both subtle and overt. Often it was in the form of what is called "good-natured fun":

> Wednesday September 23rd, freezing cold, everyone kept saying, "Oh she'll last another week," or "I give her a couple of days." It really bothered me. I guess I'm not a morning person, I don't think I did a thing all morning. (Aimee journal 1, p. 11)

Comments like these can be particularly demeaning. After identifying her feelings of being bothered, Aimee went on in the next sentence to internalize the experience, writing that she was "not a morning person." Could it be that in a somewhat hostile environment, Aimee attributed the reasons for difficulty with the new language and skills to some kind of personal deficiency? Is expressing a deficiency like this, a product of harassment? It seems that in these situations, the women tended to internalize factors that the males in the class would not have internalized. Helen's first reaction to overheard complimentary remarks, Aimee's quiet frustration, and Helen's speculation on her paranoia are examples of women's responses to perceived harassment. Here is another example of a woman feeling silenced:

> He didn't like to be challenged by a different approach. . . . I found [the way he spoke to me] to be offensive and I wasn't as experienced as him or because I'm just a "dumb woman" doing a job I have no business doing. Both ways annoyed me. One problem we had was the blue chalkline on the floor, it was very faint and he kept saying it doesn't matter, we can measure five-and-a-half inches from the edge all the way along. Well, I didn't think that was the correct way and I kept saying we have to get it on the blue line. As it turned out, Dan came over at the end and confirmed what I had been saying. He didn't acknowledge that I had been right all day. . . . I

> wanted to confront him but I let it go. I really wanted to say, "I told you so, so why wouldn't you listen to me?" (Helen journal 1, p. 9)

It's possible that if Helen was a male she might have been accorded more respect for her views. For example, one of the mature male students was regularly given leadership roles despite a record of numerous mistakes. On occasion, Susan was given responsibility, possibly because of her quiet achievement and commitment to learning. However, despite her being the best in the class, at one point she wrote, "I guess I need to get a little more aggressive and push my way in. Nancy (roommate) said about two weeks ago that I shouldn't let the guys who think they know everything just push through and do everything" (Susan journal 2, p. 9). And yet when she would get pushy, she was not listened to. It's a common dilemma for women, according to Caplan (1989), who describes two sets of labels provided by society: "the seductive–submissive–admiring–compliant kind and the powerful–dominant–bitchy–cold–castrating kind. Who can imagine wanting to be classified either way?" (p. 126). Sometimes these dilemmas were quite frustrating:

> When Dan started explaining the starter strip, someone picked it up and held it up to the wall. They held it up backwards. I said, "I think it goes the other way." They turned it right around so that it was upside down. (Nailing strip at the bottom.) I said, "No, just turn it around." It ended up being placed the way I thought was right so I said, "That's right." Dan said "How do you know this?" I said, "I'm pretty sure that's the way the siding guy showed us. Michel agreed. Lenny said, "Turn it around, it goes the other way." They did, and Dan said "How do you know this?" Lenny said "Because I've done it for years." So, they nailed it in that way . . . Jimmy marked the wall for the chalk line and we snapped it. Something didn't look right. It was only up one inch instead of one-and-a-half inches, so we had to do it again. After this, we put the starter strip on the same way as they did earlier. Minutes later, Peter one of the graduates from last year showed up. We started to put siding on but it didn't seem to want to hold. Pete had worked for the siding company last summer and he said, "The starter strip is on backwards." I was not a happy camper . . . It was kind of a frustrating day. Dan wanted me to be in charge of the siding crew which included Johnny, Michel,

> Theo and Dean. I couldn't seem to get them working. No one wanted to look for a ladder or hold up an end of the building paper so I could nail it. I'd just get going on something and would need an extra hand and I'd turn around to ask for help and there would be no one there. I think I spent more time looking for help than I did actually working. Not my kind of day. (Susan journal 2, p. 34)

Susan's frustration was common to those placed in leadership roles. Both of the student teachers (males) assigned to the program expressed similar feelings. However, it is possible that despite Susan's competence and achievement in the program, she had less credibility because she was a woman. I was unable to corroborate this with statements from the male students involved. When I asked them about the incident their responses were noncommittal. They may have been embarrassed.

These findings have some impact on how the form and content of curriculum should be redesigned to accommodate the learning perspectives and needs of women. A number of questions arise. Will effective teaching environments for females differ from those of males? Should the evaluation process be different for males and females? Can we learn from the reflections of these women and build more opportunities for communication, within the group and between teachers and students? Is it possible that the males may be suffering from misunderstanding and misinterpretation but are unable to express their feelings? Before addressing these and other questions, we now turn to the experiences of the males which have some relevance for the engagement of females in this program.

Males in the program were involved in a culture that valued most highly the ability to do the job. Personal regard within the class was determined largely by perception of ability. The work at the site was very task-oriented, for example, work that related to group functioning, feelings of accomplishment, and resolving conflict was addressed primarily in the context of getting the job done:

> Everyone is trying to get the job done, we didn't quit until the job was done. (Field notes, p. 12)

> We worked like steers and didn't quit until the job was done right, it was a good day. (Field notes, p. 27)

I asked both teachers and students if the students in the program could be grouped in any way. Both teachers and all but one of the male students first described the subgroupings in terms of their ability to do the job:

> So there's a group of "doing it types," they work hard but don't press the edges . . . and then there's the group that are putting out, sort of finding what is sufficient to put out . . . and there's the "doers," they're pushing all the time. (Lewis interview, pp. 1–57)

The one exception mentioned friendships as a primary classifying feature. However, he subsequently referred to ability in his descriptions. By contrast, two women spoke of the subgroups primarily in relational terms. One saw them as "leaders and followers" or "Lenny's boys"; the other as "liking what they are doing" and "annoying or bossy" (Field notes, pp. 16, 36).

A common ritual among the lunch and break groupings was telling sexist jokes. If the males were not hanging out in one of the vehicles, then conversation at a break might typically centre around jokes, automobiles, smoking, hunting, or drinking exploits:

> And Lenny's the leader, he's 44 and they look up to him, like, they use him as a role model even though they think at times he's a little bit stupid. But still, they go drinking together. (Helen interview, pp. 1–16)

> At lunch the guys are gathered in a rough circle, handing around cards from a parlour game. Laughter comes across as someone tells a joke. People are smiling as they put on their aprons and hardhats. (Field notes, p. 62)

In the preface of his book on male initiation and the role of the mentor, Robert Bly (1990) is critical of standard North American rituals of socialization:

> We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them. By the time a man is thirty-five he knows that the images of the right man, the tough man, the true man which he received in high school do not

> work in life. Male initiation . . . defective mythologies that ignore masculine depth of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, work to keep men boys, and entangle both men and women in systems of industrial domination that exclude both matriarchy and patriarchy. (p. ix)

My impression of the teachers was that they wanted to involve their students at deeper levels than those described by Bly. They certainly advocated a collaborative spirit. However, getting the job done was associated with doing well, and if it came to a choice between spending time exploring depth of feeling such as in journalling or discussions, the choice would fall on the side of doing the work. One particular conversation I had with a student teacher who had completed a practice-teaching placement was an example of how getting the job done was paramount:

> I felt really frustrated twice with two students, but the frustration wasn't necessarily because of them. It was because I . . . didn't know how I was being evaluated or even if I was. I got there as a student teacher and I didn't know whether they were going to—how they were looking at me—on the amount of work that I got done? So the amount of work that I got done was directly proportional to the way that the students performed, right? Or whether I just got the point across and I could speak to them or get the instructions across so they could understand—which, also if I did that properly . . . the efficiency of the whole group would be better too. Like, they got more work done and it was all based on that. (Bud interview, pp. 1–145)

Getting the job done, toughing out the weather, not quitting, hanging out, and acting like "men" were the rites and images adopted and played out each day. They served to enhance a common male view of coming of age that tends to devalue the qualities that Bly refers to. There was an almost unconscious downgrading of these qualities; for example, journalling was not popular and was seen as something that was imposed. Journals were explained as an opportunity for students to express feelings and reflect on their experiences. It was a major part of their Communications English credit, but little or no time was allotted for reflection and completion of journals during class time. In a direct manner, it modelled

that reflection was less important than the work of building. This is not to say that reflection necessarily needs to be done in a formal manner such as journalling or group discussions. Horwood (1992) has shown how informal storytelling can be a valuable form of reflection. "To learn from an experience, a person must interpret it in some way. To relate an event as a story is to construe the event and to put it into some reasonable context that makes sense in the light of the person's other experiences" (1992, p. 20).

Stories told at a break or lunch time tended to follow a predominantly male perspective. This perspective tended to devalue any stories that females were inclined to recount. When the females did contribute, they were inclined to tell stories associated with the subjects males commonly discussed. For example, one of the adolescent women would often be involved in listening to and telling sexist jokes. With the exception of formal exercises such as journalling, the females did not have a forum for expressing their relational needs. The emphasis on getting the job done rather than on other appropriate relational experiences such as journalling, discussions, and informal storytelling could be seen as an impediment to the more complete engagement of the female students and quite possibly of the males as well.

What can we say about engagement as it relates to the development of gender identities? Were these women emotionally involved within the substance of the activity? To the extent that engagement means being embroiled in personal and interpersonal relationships, or to the extent that engagement comes with enquiry, dialogue, and making, these women were fully engaged. But the gender quality of their engagement is what concerns us here. In their own words, these women reveal what it is like to live their lives in an environment underscored by sexism, double standards, stereotyped roles, and prejudice ingrained in the structures, routines, and relationships of daily schooling. What, then, can schools (and teachers) do?

Reconstructing a Critical Curriculum

There are two camps with opposing strategies. The first addresses the need to develop identity separately (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986) and is based on research that attributes

capacities such as increased self-esteem and career satisfaction to schooling males and females separately. This view includes my own speculations about the benefits of having a class exclusively made up of women build a house. The opposing view is represented by those who demonstrate how issues of developing positive gender identities are incumbent on programs which involve both sexes:

> Girls and boys, men and women, live in a web of reciprocal and interactive relations. Boys and men are so important a reference group for girls and women that they are unable to change without bringing the other sex with them. In sociological terms, boys/men have both power and influence. Girls/women cannot change by themselves, and in practice they do not want to. (Stevenson, 1990, p. 23)

Research supports either view—that both separate and integrated schooling have value in developing positive gender identities in women. The key factor, however, seems to be a critical evaluation of curriculum, about the nature of what is being studied, regardless of the structural characteristics of a program. For our purposes, the means for transforming relationships between girls and boys and men and women would include concern for the involvement and development of boys. It follows, then, that men need to take on leadership roles in anti-sexist work with boys. Work with boys and men would also assist in reducing some of the contradictions inherent in focusing one's energies on girls and women alone. One example is the hidden stigma that Edwards (1993) writes of when programs are focused exclusively on quality-of-life strategies for adolescent women:

> . . . which is as dangerous as ignoring self-esteem completely. The former risks transmitting a message to young women that they are (yet again) deficient and in need of repair while allowing society to focus on girls themselves as the locus of the problem rather than taking responsibility for the social context which devalues them. Yet to ignore self-esteem is to deny the fundamentals of empowerment. As with most strategies, balance is everything. (p. 25)

So, such male leadership could involve boys and adolescent men in becoming successful at feminine-attributed qualities such as caring, sensitivity, and the expression of other feelings. But in this program it seemed that to do so was to diminish one's status. By way of illustration, I remember a comment made by one adolescent male in response to a query about his lack of willingness to discuss or reflect on his relationships with others in the program: "Uh, I don't need no journal to build a house," he replied (Field notes, p. 64). It seems that to this male there was nothing to be gained from efforts not normally associated with building a house, or being a male. Steinem describes this as a "polarization of feminine and masculine," where playing out what she calls "totalitarian gender roles" (1993, p. 257) becomes familiar to the point of being recognised as one's nature. This is particularly debilitating in contexts such as this program because where there is a definite division of labour—of who does what and how value is determined for what is done—this entrenches the notion that so-called masculine qualities have more value.

One can speculate on how difficult it is to involve males in roles that challenge common views of what it takes to become a man. I am reminded of one student's difficulty in dealing with an ongoing problem she was experiencing:

> I'm really having a dilemma with [my son] Jimmy. He is bored in his daycare. He has been there for two-and-a-half years. When he started again in September I really didn't give it any thought, but it's the same teachers, same toys, same room, and all of his friends, well most anyway, have moved on. Well, he hates going there and I can understand why. He loves school in the afternoon but the morning daycare he hates. I'm having a hard time justifying why he is there, just so I can learn carpentry. While I was going to school last year I promised things would slow down, but really they haven't. (Helen journal 1, pp. 1–47)

It really does represent a dilemma for Helen; on the one hand she is questioning her worthiness as a mom in farming out her child so she can just learn carpentry, and on the other hand there is the unspoken consequence of leaving the program—risking the stigma of becoming a quitter, an important consideration for a woman

attempting to break into a nontraditional occupation. How can teachers begin to provide the leadership Stevenson (1993) suggests when she says that in sociological terms, boys and men have both power and influence?

One possibility emerges from Kaufman's (1993) critique of Robert Bly's (1990) conception of masculinity as a core biological reality and/or one developed through roles. Kaufman suggests that "the dominant forms of masculinity exist, not as timeless archetypes, but as power relationships with women, children, other men and our surrounding world" (p. 267). In other words, it may be erroneous to think that the development of one's gender or way of behaving in the world is based on some essential male or female quality perceived to exist at one's emotional core. This individualistic conception of learning and development is a view which ignores a social and cultural construction of masculinity which is based, according to Kaufman, in a patriarchal society. Kaufman is really pushing for a critical view of the commonplace, taken-for-granted practices and dominant modes of thinking that permeate society and classroom cultures.

In returning for a moment to Helen's dilemma, one could reconstruct such an experience within the context of this program by connecting her problem to issues of power and role definition. The first thing that comes to my mind is to suggest a means for looking after her child at the jobsite with her classmates as caregivers. This would certainly fit the popular notion that involvement in childcare activity would help to connect boys and men to the emotional intensity of care for infants and young children. Kaufman feels that such work is important for boys and men in reconnecting with a maleness which has been set aside.

Simon and Dippo (1992) are also helpful in formulating an understanding of what can be done to engage young people in the process of questioning their future identities and possibilities. They call schools sites of cultural politics where value in terms of identity and worth are formed. Like Kaufman, Simon and Dippo say that there is a need to transform individualistic conceptions of learning by challenging the wisdom of experience—to challenge the prevailing wisdom that experience is the best teacher. Their contention is that work experience similar to the one studied here is

often "taken for granted as complete or self-contained and is ignored in the classroom in favour of general employability skills" (1992, p. 123). They call for teachers to acknowledge work experience as a legitimate aspect of schooling at the same time as challenging its form and content. They identify four primary ways in which work experience can be understood. These versions of experience are relevant because they help us to understand how to reconstruct the practice of work study programs as they relate to the development of gender identities.

According to Simon and Dippo, "the emphasis any given program places on one or more of these notions of experience has different implications for thinking through the ways in which the practice of work education should be accomplished" (p. 124). Simon and Dippo believe that the emphasis placed on these ways of experience will determine the nature of cultural politics in a program.

1. *Experience is information and techniques one acquires by participating in new and different situations.* These situations are valued because they are about learning what to do and how to do it, and are usually consistent with what the teacher expects the work experience to provide. For example, Helen's description of learning how to hammer nails fits with common assumptions about the development of procedural knowledge—that it is a process of puzzling out how to do something.

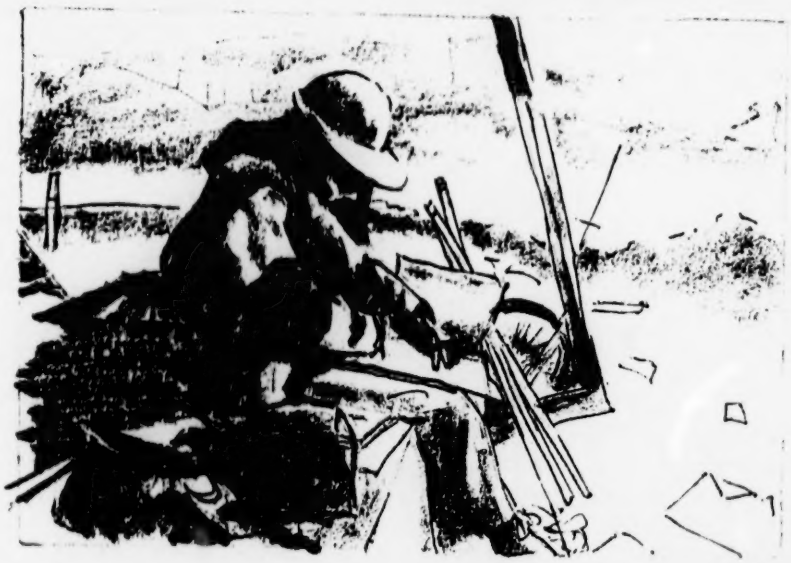
> So I do notice that the guys can nail about three times faster than I. I don't think strength has anything to do with it. I think it's when I'm starting to nail I don't whack it as hard as them because I'm afraid of hitting my thumb or finger. I think that would annoy me for the whole day. I think it's like skiing, that once you fall, you begin to lose the fear of falling and can go on with your skiing, the same with hammering . . . I'm feeling more comfortable with the saw as well. (Helen journal 1, p. 10)

While this particular experience may be congruent with school knowledge, others were not. For example, in the narrative outlined earlier where Susan is assigned a leadership task in the application of the siding, we see that, despite her obvious competence, her leadership goes unrecognised. Situations like this are fertile ground for

teachers and students to explore the social relationships of the worksite. Susan was unable to do this—outside of her journal in a passing comment on how her day went. There was a tacit assumption here that if she is deemed to be competent and is assigned a leadership role, then the male students will be able to handle it. In this instance, working with the males of the program might help by challenging the conservatism inherent in allowing experience to speak for itself. For allowing experience to speak for itself without some kind of critical reflection is simply just job training and sexist training at that.

2. *Experience is a personal characteristic that one has as a result of participating in real work.* The emphasis in this program on getting the job done was, in the main, a reflection of one of the qualities associated with the engagement of the students in this program—real world experience. Real world experience was valued by the students above all else as a means of preparing them for acceptance in the job marketplace. This includes such capacities as work habits, dispositions, perspectives, and other qualities one would attribute to work experience. Such authentic experiences are perceived to be assets by the students and prospective employers; authenticity is a main selling feature of work study programs within schools and colleges. Simon and Dippo refer to this as a "commodification of self," where the work experience is perceived to equip graduates with the skills necessary to survive in the world of work (i.e., to turn one's self into a commodity). But commodification of self presents problems for the development of gender identities. For when the self is commodified, are not students encouraged to fill capacities that fit prevailing social forms? For example, making a fuss about not being listened to because you are a woman will not usually get one a job, whereas knowing how to do the job might.

A critical reconstruction of the curriculum of experience in this respect calls for radical shifts in the realities of the world of work. Such shifts could not reduce the ability of students to do the job, but rather would add the capacity for more interactive and more happily engaged workers. This is very difficult, even dangerous, for schools to attempt because it means nothing less than changing prevailing social norms.



3. *Experience is a challenging situation that is to be endured or undergone.* Impelling students into rites of passage that involve opportunities for growth associated with the challenges (perceived or otherwise) of the world is a tenet of experiential learning. The basic idea is that one is made stronger by experiences that test one's character. Aimee tells of her experience:

> It's hell, it's like you know, the worst. But when you're done, you're so proud of it you want to go back again . . . it feels the same with the house, I know in the long run I'm going to be really, really proud and glad I did it...I mean there have been points, like you know, working in the mud or in the rain or snow—it's just like you wish you could give up but you know, like—I COULDN'T—give up. I don't want to, I'd be afraid of what the others thought of me and . . . it's kind of like if you stop on a portage and you say "I'm not going any further" you know you've still got to do it. You might as well work your hardest, you're going to end up finishing it. Just do the best you can. Suffer through and it'll get better. (Aimee interview, pp. 1–85)

Now, in reading Aimee's words, one could also surmise that she has developed certain qualities—a positive attitude for example, one that indicates her willingness to participate and learn. But Simon and Dippo suggest that such quality can be construed as "a particular practical congruence between a specific set of student capacities and the existing requirements of an already-established social form" (1992, p. 128). In other words, the perception of having a so-called "good attitude" or to be engaged in a certain manner (or with certain people) is evidence that one possesses certain qualities. For young women and men forming their gender identities, this is particularly important as there is considerable pressure to conform to that which is already known. The same holds true for Susan's experience as a leader—males don't listen to females whether they're right or wrong. She may then form the view that she has to grin and bear it in order to make it through.

Here the choice can be problematic for participants. Aimee can choose to stay with the portage and grow and feel good after—or Susan may grin and bear it. Both risk sustaining potentially inequitable and disrespectful relationships within existing social norms about the roles of women. But although the choice needs to be clearly that of the student, teachers and curriculum need to anticipate, acknowledge, and respond to such dilemmas. Anticipation, or examining the potential for development in an experience, is common in experiential education—why not include discussions of the dilemma of sticking with a difficult and fundamentally flawed situation? Why not discuss how one might conceptualize and negotiate issues of identity formation within challenging, endurance situations? The key here, of course, is for practitioners to frame challenges in a way that would maximize the transformative potential of experience.

4. *Experience is the knowledge and understanding one accomplishes or develops in the way in which one makes sense of a situation or set of events.* Simon and Dippo see the relationships that people form "as an understanding that is constructed as a particular interpretation of a specific engagement with material and people over time" (1992, p. 128). This version of experience is dependent both on what participants bring to the situation in terms of predispositions, ideas, and assumptions, and on the context and

reflective opportunities that programs may offer. Helen's account of misuse of the chalkline on the floor is a case in point. She found the reaction of the males to her different approach to be offensive. In the end, although she wanted to confront one particular male about his sexist attitude, she decided "to let it go" (Helen journal 1, p. 9). This was an opportunity for her to confront the ideas, terms, procedures, relations, and her feelings—and in doing so, to make sense of their presence in the workplace. However, she had already learned the uselessness of confrontation, and the teachers were not modelling anything that told her how it might be different. A critical pedagogy of work education, according to Simon and Dippo, would mean that such situations would be examined in order to establish whether "existing forms encourage expanded capacities or whether they deny, disable, distort, dilute these capacities" (p. 123). It would mean that no experience would be celebrated uncritically.

These four views of experience can be summarized and understood in a broader fashion through the field of cultural psychology—the study of contextual behaviour of psychological processes. Cole (1990) understands that what makes humans different from other species is that we are able to modify our environment through the production of artifacts, and that these artifacts are the means by which humans are able to reproduce and transform subsequent generations. Now, artifacts are constituted of both technical and social relations—for example, the development of a procedural skill such as building a house is a technical relation. Technical relations are embedded in social relations which are the symbolic understandings that accompany productive activity. In other words, the two mutually modify one another, not unlike theory and practice relationships. The first two views of experience formulated by Simon and Dippo, those of experience as information and techniques and as the acquisition of personal characteristics used here, are examples of technical relations. The latter two, endurance of challenging situations and knowledge and understanding, can be understood as social relations or the conceptual side of practical production. This secondary, technological-studies program was based on the notion that the authentic experience of building a house would be an appropriate rite of passage for the

development of these adolescent and adult men and women. Simon, Dippo, and Schenke (1991) contend that the development of proficiency and a sense of competence is valuable to the extent that where

> work education programs focus exclusively on the technical relations of production, they deny students the opportunity to develop insights into the social relations within which technique is embedded. (p. 132)

The currents identified here represent tensions found in schools: an emphasis on education for work training on the one hand, and education for personal development on the other. This tension is played out in the context of an emphasis on work preparation at the expense of development of gender identities which question the legitimacy of prevailing social roles. The main point is that researchers are only just beginning to observe and listen to the narratives of teachers and what they have to say about their teaching. This study is part of that process, but more importantly, it has also given voice to students. Their voices are important because, like teachers, students not only have significant (and sometimes cryptic) stories to tell but these stories represent departure points from which researchers and, more importantly, teachers can engage in the development of a critical praxis.

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